



March 22, 2006

Dear Colleagues:

I am pleased to share with you the Department of Workforce Development's most recent study, the *Barrier Screening and Assessment Evaluation* report, which examines the effectiveness of the Barrier Screening Tool (BST) and assessment process in addressing the employment barriers of participants in the Wisconsin Works (W-2) program. The purpose of the BST is to provide Financial and Employment Planners (FEPs) with information that will enable them to develop suitable, individualized employability plans for W-2 participants. This study examines how W-2 agencies have implemented the BST and assessment procedures and its impact on case planning for W-2 participants.

The BST and the procedures for its use are new and innovative. Since it was implemented by DWD in 2003, at least two other states have adopted Wisconsin's BST for their own use. The results from this first evaluation of the BST will provide valuable information to DWD as it seeks to refine and enhance the usefulness of the tool. Based on these results, the Department is taking additional steps to ensure that the BST and assessment process is used more consistently by W-2 agencies across the state.

Among the results is the important finding that participants who completed the BST were more likely to be assigned to activities related to assessments, counseling and rehabilitation. Additional findings from the study are summarized below.

- About half of the participants in Community Service Job (CSJ) and W-2 Transition (W-2T) placements completed the BST. There was considerable variation in the BST completion rate by W-2 agency and among FEPs within agencies.
- In Milwaukee County, there were no statistically significant differences in the BST completion rates by race. In the balance of state, black participants were less likely to complete screenings than white participants. The differences between Hispanics and whites in the balance of state were less pronounced.
- The most common types of potential employment barriers identified by the BST were "medical or physical barriers" and "trauma." In most cases, a potential barrier was identified in combination with other potential barriers.
- In those cases where the BST indicated the need for a formal assessment, more than half of the participants either had an assessment that met policy criteria or a valid reason for not completing the assessment.
- In instances where action was required on the part of the W-2 agency:
  - About half of the participants had recommendations from the assessment that addressed all their potential barriers included in their employability plan, or there was a valid reason for not completing the assessment; and
  - The remaining participants either lacked an assessment or a recommendation from the assessment was not in their employability plan.

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In light of the finding that participants who complete the BST are more likely to be assigned to activities related to assessment, counseling and rehabilitation, the Department is taking additional steps to ensure that the BST and assessment process is used more consistently by W-2 agencies across the state. These steps include:

- Developing strategies to improve W-2 agencies' BST completion rates, including identifying best practices in agencies with high completion rates and promoting these practices with other agencies. This includes developing strategies for eliminating broad variation in BST completion rates among FEPs in the same W-2 agency.
- Developing strategies to improve W-2 agencies' follow-through on formal assessment and application of the assessment information in development of employability plans.
- Identifying changes to policies and procedures that may improve outcomes for participants with barriers.
- Reviewing all required training for W-2 agency staff, especially for front-line supervisors and leads, and developing additional core curriculum requirements where necessary.
- Enhancing how the Department monitors agencies in their administration of the Barrier Screening Tool and assessment process.

Beyond addressing issues raised by this current study, the Department is committed to the long-term improvements in how we identify and address barriers to employment among W-2 participants. We plan to continue to monitor BST completion rates among W-2 agencies and by FEPs within agencies with individual follow-up with those agencies whose completion rates do not show improvement. In addition, we will continue to study the BST and its application. Our next study will report on services and activities of participants who had barriers identified through the BST, and follow up on their post-program outcomes.

Best regards,



Roberta Gassman  
Secretary